

News from the Existing Industry Development Division

EID Launches Regional Business Roundtables

Meetings Held Across Virginia to Discuss Issues with Industry Leaders

What started as a suggested method for assessing the impact of Existing Industry Development's business visitation program, blossomed into a pilot regional roundtable initiative this year. "A series of nine roundtables were held from July 1999 to June 2000 in Staunton, Abingdon, Herndon, Dahlgren, Suffolk, Winchester, Hampton, Danville, and South Boston," reported EID division director Jim Witherspoon.

EID visits over 2,500 companies each year to assess needs and provide assistance. "We wanted to hear from the companies we visit to gain a clear perspective on the value of the program and suggestions for improvement," explained Senior Project Manager Will Vehrs. At the same time, the division recognized an opportunity to integrate one of the themes from Governor Gilmore's Virginia Strategy, to "create a forum for business leader roundtable discussions to explore business issues..."

Each of EID's three geographic teams approached the project with a degree of autonomy, adjusting for regional differences and anticipated participants. Invited companies included a list developed from businesses contacted in the most recent visit cycle. In several sessions, additional meetings were held to review the cumulative results with local economic development officials.



Jim Witherspoon looks on as attendees at Dahlgren discuss communications infrastructure.

It became immediately apparent that business issues would take the spotlight. Companies brought up issues that were significantly impacting their ability to grow and maintain a competitive advantage. Not surprisingly, labor availability was the major issue across the state. "But what we learned in the regional process was that the labor issues meant different things to different industries and regions," said Witherspoon. "In one area it was salary competition, in another the issue was skill sets, while other regions focused on retraining." Additional industry specific and regional issues also surfaced, including Internet

access, transportation, federal contracts, suppliers, and procurement.

Although business issues took center stage for most of the discussions, attendees also provided valuable feedback to EID on the visit program. Suggestions included the expanded use of e-mail and electronic attachments, use of electronic media for alerts on items of interest to industry sectors, and methods for improving communication between visits.

So where does the program go from here? "The pilot has been very successful, and the regional roundtables will become a new feature of our annual work plan," said Witherspoon. "They have provided us with a new information resource and new insight into regional issues. The challenge will be to develop a consistent channel for responding to those issues and facilitating change." Ideas for FY2001 include topic and industry specific events to compliment the regional discussions. If you have suggestions or comments regarding the regional business roundtables, call EID at (804) 371-8221 or e-mail jwitherspoon@dba.state.va.us.

Growing New Businesses: Small Business Incubators

Virginia
Economic
Development
Seminar

June 21, 2000
9 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Holiday Inn
Hampton Hotel &
Conference Center
Hampton, VA

At the June seminar, some of Virginia's experts in the small business incubator community will explain how incubators have created new jobs, revitalized inner-city neighborhoods, and diversified local economies once built around single industries. Pete Collins, Director of Entrepreneurial Services for PricewaterhouseCoopers, will also join us from New York to share his national perspective and advice on this innovative economic development technique.

For more information on the seminar or to register, call (804) 371-0371 or visit our website at www.dba.state.va.us.

News from the Workforce Services Division

Dan River Inc. Weaves Miraculous Comeback

Danville Manufacturer's Technological Innovations Increase Sales By 277%



Over a decade ago, Dan River Inc. was bogged down with debt, struggling against foreign competitors, and facing a crisis in the U.S. textile industry. Today, the Danville-based company has emerged as a leading manufacturer and marketer of textile products for the home fashions and apparel fabrics markets such as packaged bedroom furnishings. Dan River's sales leaped from \$270 million in 1990 to a projected \$650 million in 2000.

How did Dan River become one of the strongest competitors of bedding products, the leading supplier of men's dress shirting fabrics in North America, and the leading producer of lightweight yarn-dyed woven fabrics in the Western Hemisphere? The company invested over \$300 million in a series of acquisitions, equipment updates, and system changes related to forecasting, inventory tracking, warehouse and shipping, machine monitoring, energy, sales, & product costing. These technological innovations updated an antiquated 100 year old facility into the Model Mill of the Year, according to Textile World magazine. As the largest employer in the city, Dan River has approximately 4,000 employees at its Danville facility and a total of over 7,500 workers at all of its U.S. facilities, which also include operations in Brookneal and Portsmouth, VA.

DBA's Workforce Services division has worked with Dan River since 1992, assisting with training employees to operate the new, technologically-advanced looms. "Dan River must continue to upgrade and modernize its equipment in order to stay competitive in today's market," said Greg Boozer, Executive Vice President of Manufacturing for Dan River. "Irby Jones and the Workforce Services team have been a tremendous asset to our training efforts."

Practical Applications of Finance in Economic Development

June 22, 2000 · 8:30 a.m. - 3:15 p.m.

Chesapeake Conference Center

Course fee: \$80

Register on-line at:

[http://www.conted.vt.edu/finance/
index.htm](http://www.conted.vt.edu/finance/index.htm)

(540) 231-6638

2nd Annual Small Business Incubator Conference

June 20, 2000 · Noon - 5:30 p.m.

Holiday Inn Hampton Hotel & Conference Center

Small Business Incubator Staff and Board Members and other community leaders interesting in developing a small business incubator should not miss this opportunity to hear from Virginia's small business incubator experts on this important economic development tool for the community. The \$20 course fee is waived when you register to attend the Virginia Economic Development Seminar on June 21. For more information, call Rob Blackmore at (804) 371-8260.



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